
A 150-million-year-old fossilised skull belonging to a creature called a pliosaur has been unearthed along the Jurassic Coast in Dorset in England. Experts think it could be one of the world's biggest ever found. Our science reporter Rebecca Morelle has more:

While dinosaurs roamed the land, pliosaurs **terrorised the oceans**. These giant, crocodile-shaped creatures were **fearsome hunters**, their immense jaws and razor-sharp teeth made easy work of **passing prey**. Now an 8ft-long **skull** has been found in Dorset by **a local fossil collector**. And scientists say it could be one of the biggest ever found, belonging to a creature that would have measured up to 50ft long. **Palaeontologist** Richard Forrest has been examining the **specimen**.

Richard Forrest: "To get a whole skull like this **is like Christmas and Easter and everything rolled into one**, because we actually can see, yes this really was an absolutely enormous animal, and realistically, probably the most powerful **predator** that ever lived.'

The fossilised skull has now been bought by Dorset County Council using Heritage Lottery Funds. They plan to eventually put it **on public display**.

Rebecca Morelle, BBC News

Vocabulary and definitions

| | |
|--|--|
| terrorised the oceans | frightened sea creatures and fed on them |
| fearsome hunters | frightening creatures which look for, chase and kill other sea creatures |
| passing prey | creatures which were swimming along and which the pliosaurs could catch and eat |
| skull | the bones of the head which give the head its shape |
| a local fossil collector | someone whose hobby it is to dig for and find fossils (bones, shells or the shapes of plants or animals which have been preserved in rock for a very long time) in the area near where they live |
| palaeontologist | person whose job is to study fossils as a way of getting information about the history of life on Earth |
| specimen | example (here, this particular fossil) |
| is like Christmas and Easter and everything rolled into one | is a very good or happy time (in the Christian calendar, both Christmas and Easter are happy times of celebration) |
| predator | animal that hunts, kills and eats other animals |
| on public display | available for members of the public to see |

More on this story: http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8322000/8322629.stm

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/10/091028_witn_fossil.shtml